



State of Connecticut

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STATE CAPITOL

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLY CHEESEMAN
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RANKING MEMBER
FINANCE, REVENUE AND BONDING COMMITTEE

MEMBER
GENERAL LAW COMMITTEE
ENERGY AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

March 8, 2022 * 11:30am * Zoom

Testimony *in support of* Raised SB 247 AN ACT REQUIRING PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION TO ESTABLISH A POLICY REGARDING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION ON CAMPUS.

Dear Chairmen Slap and Elliott, Ranking Members Witkos and Haines, and distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

I appreciate having the opportunity to submit testimony on Raised SB 247 on your public hearing agenda today. I wholeheartedly support the effort to ensure that the First Amendment freedoms of all on college campuses are not abridged. Freedom of speech is a fundamental American freedom, a human right, and a core value of our society. Universities should foster robust and vigorous debate and the free exchange of differing views on all topics and should not punish those who exercise their first amendment rights.

“The First Amendment to the Constitution protects speech no matter how offensive its content. Restrictions on speech by public colleges and universities amount to government censorship, in violation of the Constitution. Such restrictions deprive students of their right to invite speech they wish to hear, debate speech with which they disagree, and protest speech they find bigoted or offensive. An open society depends on liberal education, and the whole enterprise of liberal education is founded on the principle of free speech.

How much we value the right of free speech is put to its severest test when the speaker is someone we disagree with most. Speech that deeply offends our morality or is hostile to our way of life warrants the same constitutional protection as other speech because the right of free speech is indivisible: When we grant the government the power to suppress controversial ideas, we are all subject to censorship by the state. Since its founding in 1920, the ACLU has fought for the free expression of all ideas, popular or unpopular. Where racist, misogynist, homophobic, and transphobic speech is concerned, the ACLU believes that more speech — not less — is the answer most consistent with our constitutional values....”

(<https://www.aclu.org/other/speech-campus>)

The proposed legislation mirrors very well the so-called Chicago Principles, drawn up by a committee at the University of Chicago in July 2014. These principles enumerate a university's role in fostering, promoting, and protecting free speech on college campuses. So far more than fifty-five institutions have officially endorsed the Chicago Statement including [Princeton University](#), [Purdue University](#), American University, [Columbia University](#), [Georgetown University](#), and the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#), among others. The following states have also enacted free speech legislation: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah and Virginia. Passing this legislation would ensure that Connecticut institutions of higher education are in the forefront of protecting freedom of expression and ensuring that campuses are a bastion of robust intellectual debate.

I appreciate you taking my comments into consideration on Raised SB 247 and I urge Committee members to support this bill. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Holly Cheeseman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Holly Cheeseman
State Representative, 37th District
East Lyme, Niantic, Salem